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Vreny Enongene

Technological University Dublin, vreny.enongene1@mydit.ie

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Pushing the Boundaries of Traditional Methodological Approaches in Conducting Research in Tourism and Social Sciences: A Religious and Pilgrimage Tourism Case Study

Vreny Enongene, Doctoral Researcher

Dublin Institute of Technology, School of Hospitality Management and Tourism

Email: vreny.enongene1@mydit.ie **Tel:** 00353-1402-4527, **Mob:** 00353899632087

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The aim of this paper is to highlight the importance and usefulness of non-standardised research methodological approaches to knowing / knowledge development in tourism research, and in the social sciences in general. Crucial in that, extant research efforts have been characterised by stringent laid-down methodological and philosophical assumptions. Concurrently, an extensive review of extant methodological approaches to knowledge development within the religious and pilgrimage tourism scholarship (RPTS) revealed that studies have been guided by generic ontological and epistemological philosophical assumptions. Franklin and Crang (2001, p.6) concurred the above as they observed 'a tendency for studies of tourism researchers to follow a template'. This thus, justifies the need for more innovative approaches in advancing knowledge in the field. While acknowledging the usefulness and importance of such mundane traditional approaches to knowledge development in tourism studies and in the social sciences over the decades, recent and ongoing debates by research methodology scholars and critics, advocate the move away from such mundane traditional quantitative Richards & Munsters (2010) and qualitative (Ren, Pritchard & Morgan, 2010) research approaches to the creation and development of knowledge. As they advocate the need for more scrutiny with regards to the ways in which tourism studies are conducted and how we as individuals create this knowledge (Ren, *et al.*, 2010). Such arguments corroborate Cooper's observation that 'tourism research is at an important turning point in its development' (2002, p.37). Therefore, while agreeing with Tribe's assertion that tourism research is not in a grip of a restrictive paradigm and is hardly affected by performativity (Tribe, 2005, p. 5), such observations, thus validate the use of a multiplicity of paradigms or research positions, perspectives and methods in the development of knowledge in tourism. Thus, in providing a comprehensive understanding of a rather complex and sensitive social phenomenon, such as the sacred site visitor experience management, the use of a multiplicity of research position/ paradigms and perspectives are invaluable in providing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. However, an extensive review of methodological approaches in conducting research within the religious and pilgrimage tourism scholarship, revealed the lack of methodological innovativeness, a crucial element in the development of knowledge within the field. Hence, in bridging this gap and advancing knowledge in the field, in exploring the sensitive and complex sacred site visitor experience management phenomenon a multiplicity of research position/ paradigms, perspectives and methods that are rooted in phenomenology, feminist and discourse analytical paradigms were employed.

Findings revealed that the use of a non-standardised approach to conducting research are vital in generating insightful, natural/ organic/ undiluted data. While revealing the invaluable role the researcher's cultural and religious / spiritual orientation can play in the creation of knowledge. As well as in advancing knowledge within the field of study. The findings have implications for tourism researchers, especially doctoral researchers in cultural tourism where there is a need to move beyond the use of standardised approaches to knowledge development, especially with regards to complex social realities involving participants lived experiences, particularly within the religious and pilgrimage tourism scholarship. Where research methodological innovativeness is yet to be embraced.

Selected Reading

Franklin, A. & Crang, M. (2001). The Trouble with Tourism and Travel Theory. *Tourist Studies*, Vol.1 (1). pp.5-22.

Richards, G., & Munster, W. (2010). *Cultural Tourism Research Methods* (eds.) Oxfordshire: CABI International.

Ren, C., Pritchard, A., & Morgan, N. (2010). Constructing Tourism Research: A Critical Inquiry. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 37, (4) pp. 885-904.

